

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 SCS-03 SCA-01 SS-15 DHA-02

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FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9964

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INFO AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

USMISSUON USUN NEW YORK

AMCONSUL IBADAN

AMCONSUL KADUNA

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AF FOR AMBASSADOR EASUM

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, NI

SUBJECT: DEPORTATION OF NEW YORK TIMES CORRESPONDENT DARNTON

REF: (A) STATE 55983 (B) LAGOS 2968

1. SUMMARY: EXTAFF COMMISSIONER GARBA HAS CONFIRMED DARNTON
EXPULSION WAS HIGH-LEVEL DECISION "FOR CAUSE," CITING SPECIFIC
OBJECTIONABLE ARTICLES, EXPRESSING FEAR THAT SUCH ARTICLES COULD
STIR UP DISSATISFIED ELEMENTS IN NIGERIA, AND CONCLUDING THAT
DARNTON'S PRESENCE HERE WAS SIMPLY NOT HELPFUL. AMBASSADOR SANU
TAKES MUCH THE SAME LINE. GARBA EXCHANGE WAS INTERESTING FOR
HIS EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER INTERNAL SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OF THE
ARTICLES AND FOR THE SENSITIVITY AND INSECURITY WHICH THIS
REFLECTS. WE SEE NO CHANCE OF REVERSAL OF DARNTON EXPULSION ORDER.
END SUMMARY.

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2. IN ACCORDANCE WITH REF (A) CHARGE RAISED DARNTON CASE
WITH EXTAFF COMMISSIONER GARBA MARCH 17, EXPRESSING USG
REGRET OVER HIS EXPULSION AND ALLUDING TO DANGER OF
MISINTERPRETATION IN U.S; GARBA SAID HE, TOO, REGRETTED
THE WAY THINGS HAD TURNED OUT, AS HE HAD FOUGHT HARD TO
OBTAIN APPROVAL FOR DARNTON'S ADMISSION IN THE FIRST
PLACE. GARBA, HOWEVER, WE DISAPPOINTED WITH HIS OVERALL

EXPERIENCE WITH US PRESS REPRESENTATIVES -- CITING SPECIFICALLY DARNTON AND "THAT GIRL" WHO CAME TO NIGERIA LAST YEAR (KAREN DE YOUNG).

3. GARBA MADE SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO DARNTON'S ARTICLES ON MEDICAL CONDITIONS IN NIGERIA AND PIRACY IN THE LAGOS HARBOR, WHICH HE TERMED HARSHLY CRITICAL AND NOT BALANCED BY ANY MENTION OF WHAT THE FMG WAS DOING TO TRY TO ALLEVIATE THE SITUATION. THESE ARTICLES HAD PROMPTED NUMEROUS LETTERS AND ENQUIRIES TO HIM AND TO NIGERIAN REPRESENTATIVES IN WASHINGTON AND NEW YORK, EXPRESSING CONCERN OVER CONDITIONS IN NIGERIA AND QUESTIONING FMG ABILITY TO COPE EFFECTIVELY WITH THESE PROBLEMS. GARBA REFERRED ALSO TO DARNTON'S UNCONSTRUCTIVE ARTICLE ON THE FELA ANIKULAPO-KUTI INCIDENT (LAGOS 2134) AND OBSERVED THAT DARNTON WAS VERY RECENTLY ATTENDING TRIBUNAL HEARINGS TO OBTAIN MORE MATERIAL SO HE COULD WRITE ANOTHER HARMFUL ARTICLE (LAGOS 2821).

4. GARBA THEN WENT ON TO OBSERVE THAT THE FMG HAS MANY PROBLEMS TO COPE WITH AND IS STRUGGLING IN VERY DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES TO MOVE AHEAD WITH NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT. HE POINTED OUT THAT THERE ARE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN REMOVED FROM THEIR JOBS AND ARE DISSATISFIED; SUCH ELEMENTS MIGHT BE STIRRED UP BY CRITICAL ARTICLES DESCRIBING NIGERIA'S PROBLEMS AND INDICATING THAT THE HEAD OF STATE CANNOT COPE WITH THEM. GARBA SAID PEOPLE INSIDE NIGERIA MIGHT BE EASILY SUSCEPTIBLE, AS THEY TEND TO PUT MORE CREDENCE IN ARTICLES APPEARING IN THE FOREIGN PRESS THAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THOSE IN THE NIGERIAN PRESS (GARBA: "I DO TOO"). GARBA SAID IT IS UNFAIR TO CRITICIZE NIGERIA BY COMPARING IT WITH THE US, AND HE CONCLUDED THAT IT WAS SIMPLY UNHELPFUL TO HAVE DARNTON HERE.

5. GARBA'S REMARKS WERE VERY SIMILAR TO THOSE MADE BY NIGERIAN AMBASSADOR SANU OVER DRINKS AT THE CHARGE'S RESIDENCE THE EVENING BEFORE. SANU HAD IN ADDITION SAID THERE WERE 6 DARNTON ARTICLES THAT WERE OBJECTIONABLE, ALL OF THEM APPEARING SHORTLY BEFORE OR DURING FESTAC. HE ASSERTED THAT THE PIRACY ARTICLE HAD LED SOME BUSINESSMEN IN NEW YORK TO CALL HIM ABOUT THE NEED TO INCREASE INSURANCE RATES ON SHIPMENT OF GOODS TO NIGERIA.

6. COMMENT: THE CATEGORIC AND SPECIFIC RESPONSE OF BOTH GARBA AND SANU CONFIRMS OUR VIEW THAT DARNTON EXPULSION WAS HIGH-LEVEL FMG DECISION. (INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, GARBA SEEMED TO INDICATE THAT HE HIMSELF HAD NOT BEEN INVOLVED IN THE DECISION, ALTHOUGH HE AGREED WITH IT.) GARBA'S REFERENCE TO

THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF SUCH ARTICLES ON INTERNAL SECURITY
WAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST AND REFLECTS THE SENSITIVITY AND
CONTINUING FEELING OF INSECURITY OF THE CURRENT REGIME. WE
CONCLUDE THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY OF REVERSAL OF THE EXPULSION
ORDER AND CONSIDER THE PROSPECT OF APPROVAL OF VISAS FOR
OTHER AMERICAN PRESS REPRESENTATIVES UNENCOURAGING.
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